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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

4 OCT 1976

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To : The Secretary
From: INR - Harold H. Saunders

Peking's Hard Line on Taiwan

In view of the unusually tough talk from Peking on China's plans for the "liberation" of Taiwan, we thought you might welcome an analysis of this development, based on a reexamination of Peking's expressed attitude toward Taiwan in recent years. You, of course, have your own feel for Chinese attitudes, but I felt there might be some value in laying out the perspective that emerges from intelligence material.

What becomes apparent is that--although the succession maneuvering this year adds a special dimension to Chinese handling of this subject--views actually seem to have been hardening for more than two years.

A review of the material on this subject suggests that China's approach has become tougher since late 1973 as leaders in Peking have become more pessimistic about prospects for progress on the Taiwan issue. The further hardening of the Chinese position in July appears to have been precipitated by what the Chinese saw as indications in the US (and Japan) of growing concern for Taiwan's security. There seems to be a broadly-based Chinese perception that something must be done to correct US movement toward a policy of continued support for Taiwan.

Against that background, it seems likely that the unusually harsh tone used by Vice Premier Chang Ch'un-ch'iao in discussions with Senator Scott is a reflection of Chang's personal leftist bias which seems to carry somewhat anti-American overtones. While other Chinese officials have also conveyed this tougher line, all have softened it in one way or another, while several have indirectly attributed this posture to the increased influence of people like Chang.

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As a leading PRC leftist, Chang probably tends to place less value than others on ties with US "imperialism." The left feels particularly strongly about issues involving national territory and sovereignty, and has apparently been insistent that China must press hard to get the US out of Taiwan. Chang may well be convinced that China will only succeed in this effort through tough tactics, and he may not care if he offends Americans.

Looking beyond the special sharpness in Chang's statements, we do not detect a large gap between moderates and leftists on the problems of normalization, and it seems likely that we can expect continued if not increased pressure from Peking on this issue, especially following the elections.

Attachment:
Analysis.

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Peking's Hard Line on Taiwan

Introduction and Key Judgments

Following Chinese Vice Premier Chang Ch'un-ch'iao's comments to Senator Scott and the PRC's combined service exercise near the Taiwan Strait in July, we undertook a reexamination of China's attitude toward Taiwan over the past few years. We have concluded that the PRC line on "liberation" of Taiwan has been hardening since 1973, particularly in private statements, and that the change probably stems from increasing skepticism, by moderates and leftists alike, that Taiwan can be regained by peaceful means. At the same time, the development of the hard line appears colored by internal political developments. Our key judgments are:

- In 1973 Peking pursued a line which emphasized peaceful reunification with Taiwan in order to create a climate favorable to rapid normalization. However, there is evidence the left was able to use the slow-down in progress toward normalization in late 1973 and 1974 to force Chouist moderates to adopt a harder line. Since 1974, PRC pessimism about rapid US departure from Taiwan and prospects for peaceful "liberation" has grown, stimulated as much by US actions as by leftist pressure.
- American (and Japanese) statements and actions this year which the Chinese interpret as a strengthening of support for Taiwan appear to have precipitated Chang's statement to Senator Scott that force is the only way to "liberate" Taiwan. Clearly the Chinese thought these developments required a forceful reiteration of PRC determination to regain Taiwan by any means.
- Chang's vehemence, threatening tone and apparent insensitivity to the potential impact of tough talk on US opinion probably also reflect his own personal leftist bias.
- Perhaps as a result of growing pessimism about peaceful reunification, contingency planning was initiated in mid-1975 for eventual military operations against Taiwan, in the context of Peking's ongoing effort to upgrade its military capabilities. The July military exercises probably were an outgrowth of this mid-1975 decision and the general improvement in PRC coastal defense forces in recent years and not the result of events since the death of Chou or the downfall of Teng Hsiao-p'ing.

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--One aspect of China's attitude toward Taiwan is Peking's apparent concern that in the face of Sino-US normalization, Taiwan may turn to the Soviet Union for support. There appear to be no grounds for this fear, but it adds to Peking's sensitivity on the subject.

--In the period following the elections the US can expect further pressure from the PRC to fully normalize relations, regardless of the balance of power in Peking during the post-Mao succession struggle.

Hard Line on Taiwan

In July, Chinese officials put forward a tough message to the US regarding Taiwan. The essence of the message was:

--the PRC is convinced it can achieve the "liberation" of Taiwan only through force of arms, and is planning accordingly;

--if the US does not disengage from Taiwan it will be caught up in an eventual military showdown with the PRC.

This line was first expressed to Senator Scott by Vice Premier Chang Ch'un-ch'iao, and later reinforced by PRC officials speaking to the US Congressional Staff Delegation and to selected US journalists in Washington. Although not using Chang's tough words on the inevitable use of force against Taiwan, Chinese officials overseas have since expressed criticism of US China policy, and have said they foresee a harder line on Taiwan in the future. Meanwhile, China has stepped up efforts to isolate Taiwan in the international community.

This tough talk came unexpectedly. As recently as May, Peking leaders were voicing continued patience on the Taiwan issue and demonstrating clear awareness that the US could do little about Taiwan in an election year.

Source of the Line: Reaction to US Trends Colored by PRC Leadership Changes

Commenting on PRC motives for striking a tougher stance, Chinese officials have pointed to signs that Washington (in "collusion" with Tokyo) is "retreating" from the 1972 Shanghai Communique by moving toward a policy of indefinite US support for the ROC. They have cited as evidence the US government's attitude toward Taiwan's participation in the Olympics, the sale of new weapons systems to Taiwan, statements on the need for continued guarantees of Taiwan's security by American politicians including Senator Scott, and Japanese advice to the US to take a cautious approach to normalization.

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The PRC may have perceived that the issue of ROC security was being raised in such a manner that the US could be frozen into a position calling for a Chinese pledge of non-use of force, and calculated that it must strongly reiterate its refusal to concede on that issue, in hopes of keeping the US position fluid. The new line conveys the message that a US policy aimed at protecting the status quo on Taiwan could actually encourage the eventual use of force and ultimately be far more destabilizing than an early settlement on PRC terms.

In mid-July a high-level Foreign Ministry official in Peking revealed the interplay between the apparent movement in US policy and domestic Chinese politics, stating that China was responding to the US "retreat" with a hard line because certain leaders who believe China has been too soft and patient in dealing with the US on Taiwan were becoming more influential. The official implied that Vice Premier Chang was among the hard-liners whose influence was on the rise. He also raised a special Chinese concern by warning that the US should by no means consider a solution which would place Taiwan under the influence of the Soviet Union. One month later, a PRC official in Tokyo spoke of critics in China who doubt the depth of US resolve to normalize relations and suspect the US will not move ahead to establish full relations after the election.

Evolving PRC Posture on Taiwan

Clandestine sources reveal that in 1972 and 1973, Peking anticipated rapid movement on Sino-US normalization and was actively working to create the climate for US moves in this direction. Peking launched a "peace offensive" in 1973 designed to induce talks with Taipei and initiate a process whereby peaceful reunification could be achieved. In speeches aimed at Taiwan, Peking referred favorably to the US desire--as expressed in the Shanghai Communiqué--for a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question.

This approach was short-lived. Within a year Peking appeared less optimistic about the prospects for movement toward normalization. Watergate developments, the granting of new ROC consulates in the US in January 1974, and the US decision in March to continue relations with Taiwan at the ambassadorial level seemed to prompt a tougher PRC position. In February, for the first (and only) time since 1970, Chinese officials publicly claimed the PLA "must be ready at all times to liberate Taiwan." This implicit threat was not repeated, but Peking began to reassert its right to choose the means of liberating Taiwan and attacked "diehards abroad who continued to advocate a two-China policy." During the spring, Chou En-lai expressed dissatisfaction with the pace of normalization to Western diplomats.

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From mid-1974 at least until July of this year, PRC officials followed an ambivalent line on Taiwan. For the most part, they expressed "patience" on normalization and hope that "liberation" could take place through peaceful negotiations. But this was interspersed at times with expressions of "impatience," and at other times doubts were expressed that peaceful resolution would be possible:

--Ch'iao Kuan-hua expressed "the basic view of the PRC that peaceful reunification is an impossibility" to visiting delegations in May and September 1974 and again in June 1975.

--Vice Premier Li Hsien-nien in May 1974 and Teng Hsiao-p'ing in June 1975 spoke pessimistically to visiting US delegations about the Taiwan situation, paraphrasing a statement by Mao from 1945 that "when there's dust on the floor it is impossible to remove it without using a broom."*

It is not yet clear whether the hard line statements by Chang Ch'un-ch'iao and other Chinese officials represent a shift in line comparable to that which occurred in early 1974. They have not yet appeared in the PRC media, for example. Chang's strong statement threatening use of force against Taiwan in the foreseeable future has been toned down somewhat in subsequent statements by other PRC officials. At the same time, while clearly more critical of US policy and expressing dissatisfaction with the pace of normalization, PRC diplomats abroad have not generally addressed the issue of the liberation of Taiwan.

Leftist Pressure to Move Toward a Tougher Line

While the broad Chinese leadership consensus on the desirability of improving Sino-US relations continues to hold, there appear to have been long-standing differences of opinion about US intentions on the Taiwan issue and about the proper way to conduct the Sino-US dialogue.

While the left has supported the policy of Sino-US detente, it has valued that relationship less than the moderates. The leftists have been more suspicious of the US, and place greater stress on its imperialist and aggressive nature.

--At the Tenth Party Congress in August 1973, Chou En-lai's speech was clearly defensive in its advocacy of compromise

* In its original context, the citation was meant to indicate that imperialists and reactionaries never give up until confronted by a convincing threat or use of force.

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with the US as a necessary evil to counter the Soviet threat. By contrast, leftist Wang Hung-wen, who delivered the other major Congress address, hinted at a more equidistant policy by giving equal stress to the continuing danger of surprise attack from either "superpower."

--Chou's stress on the Soviet threat has prevailed generally in the period since then, but the theme of an equal threat to China from both "imperialism and social imperialism" reappeared at least twice in 1976 (e.g., a January People's Daily article by a leftist author, and another People's Daily article in August).

A key component of leftist skepticism about the US is the lack of progress toward solving the Taiwan problem. The most evident disagreement in Peking on this issue occurred in early 1974, when moderates appeared willing to deemphasize the issue, but leftists pushed strongly for a tougher line to induce more rapid movement toward normalization:

--Clandestine sources indicate that Premier Chou was pressured into supporting the early 1974 shift to a tougher public posture by leftist critics.

--One report said Chiang Ch'ing urged university students in mid-March to criticize Chou's US policy as "right-leaning."

--The PRC ambassador in London said the left was urging Chou to enter into immediate negotiations with the US on Taiwan.

--Leftist media references (during the anti-Confucius Campaign) to the illegitimacy and hostility of the Chiang Kai-shek government and to alleged US and ROC atrocities in World War II served as further reminders that the issue of Chinese sovereignty remained unresolved and that the US remained an "imperialist" occupying power.

These pressures, prompted by perceived improvements in US-ROC relations, were successful in moving the PRC toward the tougher, albeit ambivalent, position on the liberation of Taiwan it adopted in 1974. Subsequently, there has been no strong evidence of serious disagreement within the leadership on Sino-US relations and the Taiwan issue, perhaps indicating that the gap between moderate and leftist positions had narrowed. However, the nature of certain events in 1975 and 1976 suggests continuing leftist pressures on China's US policy:

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--A March 1975 attempt to insert into the US program of a visiting PRC cultural troupe a song proclaiming "we shall certainly liberate Taiwan" (resulting in the tour's cancellation), seemed out of character with prevailing policy. It was probably initiated by the left whose strength lies in the cultural sphere.

--The song was performed at a February 1976 Peking concert for Mr. Nixon hosted by Chiang Ch'ing (her first major appearance in the Sino-US context since 1973), and was replayed when the Nixon group visited an air raid shelter. Since then, nearly every US delegation including Senator Scott's has heard the song in similar "war preparations" settings, signaling that US enmity toward China and the potential for hostilities cannot be dismissed as long as Taiwan is not resolved.

--In February and March 1976, when the left was on the rise, a flurry of clandestine reports expressed "concern and dismay" on the part of Chinese leaders over lack of US movement on the Taiwan issue and forewarned that Peking might have to make some moves to speed up the pace.

--The tougher stance initiated by Chang Ch'un-ch'iao appears to be a leftist effort similar to that in early 1974 to use tough talk to maintain pressure on the US to deal with the Taiwan issue.

The Soviet Angle

In discussions of the Taiwan issue, Peking periodically has exhibited concern that the process of Sino-US normalization might force Taiwan to seek informal security ties with the USSR in a desperate effort to guarantee its continued separation from the mainland. This concern has been expressed most often--but not exclusively--to overseas Chinese, as a warning to the ROC not to move in this direction. As recently as mid-July this year, Foreign Minister Ch'iao Kuan-hua told a Romanian diplomat that Peking expects Taiwan and the USSR to develop relations in the foreseeable future.

Initially, Chinese leaders handled this issue with a show of confidence. Media and clandestine sources indicate Peking believed that as a result of new Sino-US understanding, the US would inhibit any moves by Taiwan toward the Soviet Union. Since 1973, however, Peking has expressed no optimism that the US would guarantee Taiwan's behavior and through the media has warned Taiwan not to "flirt" with the Soviet Union.

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There were signs from PRC officials and media that concern about this issue was strengthened by ROC Premier Chiang Ching-kuo's succession to power following his father's death in April 1975, and his subsequent decision to appoint as special advisor a former Foreign Minister dismissed from that office by Chiang Kai-shek for recommending that Taiwan form contacts with East Europe and the USSR.

There is no evidence that a "Soviet connection" would be seriously considered either in Taiwan or the Soviet Union. However, whether credible or not, this has been a recurrent fear expressed by high-level PRC officials since 1972.

Contingency Planning for the Liberation of Taiwan

During late 1974 and early 1975, the PRC was apparently reaching the conclusion that the only reliable deterrent to Taiwan's continued separation from the mainland was a credible military option on the PRC side. In July 1975, according to clandestine sources, the Military Affairs Commission (MAC) reexamined the whole issue of Taiwan in the context of considering broader requirements for upgrading China's defense capabilities. According to one report, Teng Hsiao-p'ing gave directives on behalf of Chairman Mao that:

- China must address the problem of "liberating" Taiwan;
- China must depend on her own strength to accomplish liberation, and must no longer allow the US to "drag China by the nose" on the issue;
- all preparations for "liberation" should be accomplished within five years.

Judging by widely conflicting clandestine reports, there was some confusion at lower levels in China on the exact message with regard to Taiwan of the principal document (Central Directive 18) issued at this MAC meeting. It appears that the armed forces were ordered to improve their capability to liberate Taiwan in the event that the ROC took drastic steps to preserve its existence, such as declaring independence or establishing ties with the Soviet Union.

The scenario of joint air, sea, and land exercises in July at the southern end of the Taiwan Strait, which involved paradrop and naval landing assaults, fits the contingency planning against Taiwan called for in Central Document 18. These exercises, which were limited in scale, formed only one part of a broader pattern of improving China's coastal defense capability which has been evident since at least late 1973.

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This pattern has included increasing sophistication in coordinating joint force maneuvers across jurisdictional lines.

It is doubtful that the basic decision to carry out this year's activities in the Strait area was made in 1976, since observable preliminary activity was already under way in March and a lead time of six to twelve months would normally precede preliminaries to such an exercise. In any event, the exercise activity gives greater credibility to statements of PRC determination to regain Taiwan by whatever means are required, and implicitly warns the ROC (and indirectly the US) against steps to effect Taiwan's indefinite separation from the mainland.

Outlook

It is not yet clear whether recent statements that force will have to be used against Taiwan represent a permanent shift in line or a temporary posture intended to make clear the PRC position in the face of a perceived increase of support in the US for Taiwan. The issue was not raised in Schlesinger's talks with the Chinese. It is likely there will be a reversion to a more ambiguous line, but one which stresses the potential use of military force more than in the past. In this regard, recent comments by PRC diplomats abroad have generally not touched on this subject, but one official mentioned that the problem of Taiwan would be solved by military means if necessary.

In any event, both before and after Mao's death, PRC officials have clearly been more critical of US policy and have been expressing greater impatience with the US failure to move more quickly on normalization. There is no evidence of serious disagreement in Peking on the need to press the US on this issue. The more patient approach to normalization and liberation of Taiwan associated with Chou En-lai thus appears to have been eclipsed by time and events.

Moreover, as long as there is a continued prospect of a separate existence for Taiwan from the mainland, Peking is likely to continue preparations, and improve capabilities for the use of economic and military pressure on Taiwan to assure eventual reunification. In particular, Peking views retention of the right to use force and development of a credible military capability as essential to preclude desperate moves by Taiwan toward independence such as the "Soviet option."

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